

# The Dallas Morning News

## *El Paso, the face of Hispanic and immigrant America, reels but vows to fight back*

Leaders called for immediate action — on everything from gun control to more voter participation — in a tight-knit predominately Hispanic community. The shooting suspect drove about 10 hours from Allen, apparently on a mission to kill immigrants in El Paso where the population is more than 80% Hispanic.

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EL PASO - Those who were shot include a 2-year-old, a coach and a 15-year-old shopping for school supplies. Most shared another commonality: They were largely Mexican Americans or Mexicans, people of color -- brown -- living in a border city that's long been under attack by fiery anti-immigrant rhetoric and now, bullets.

With the death toll from Saturday's massacre at a local Walmart at 22, leaders called not so much for sympathy, but for immediate action. Everything from gun control to more voter participation. In a tight-knit predominately Hispanic community, the grieving is especially heartfelt: The shooting suspect drove about 10 hours from Allen, apparently on a mission to kill immigrants in this city where the population is more than 80% Hispanic.

His manifesto detailed plans to stop a "Hispanic invasion of Texas."

Those words shook Ana Trujillo, 68, who prayed at the Saint Francis of Assisi Catholic Church Sunday for the victims, the suspect and his family. Prayers aside, Trujillo said, "He could have done this at Neiman Marcus in Dallas. But no, he chose to drive hundreds of miles to hunt down Mexicans like me."

She paused and fought back tears. "I'm sorry. This is very personal," she said.

The shooting broke the calmness of a Saturday morning and a false sense of security that one of the safest cities in the nation has. It was, in fact, a wakeup call for Latinos all across America. The massacre tops the number of murders El Paso has in a typical year, 18.

"El Pasoans like to think of their town as a unique bastion of social harmony and low crime," said Howard Campbell, a border expert and anthropologist at the University of Texas at El Paso. "But that utopian dream has been exploded as El Paso has become the focal point of U.S. political struggles over immigration and race. The U.S.-Mexico border is now an epicenter for the key issues of the U.S. presidential election and the question of whether the country succumbs to xenophobia and hate or progresses with unity and global cooperation."

The El Paso region is nestled in the spot where three states and two nations meet. "Two Nations. One heartbeat," says a popular T-shirt. People here see their binational, bicultural daily existence as an important asset. A strength, not a burden or weakness.

Police Chief Greg Allen said Sunday that shooting suspect Patrick Crusius, 21, is the man behind the hate-filled anti-immigrant manifesto posted just minutes before the massacre.

The manifesto warned white Americans that foreigners are replacing them. Most of the people interviewed Sunday -- leaders and locals -- blame political leaders, particularly President Donald J. Trump, for fueling the fires of anti-immigrant and anti-Hispanic racial discontent. They say they're using them as political prods. And he needs to stop.

"We cannot ignore this anymore, the combination of two evils, guns and anti-immigrant rhetoric," said Fernando Garcia, executive director of the Border Network for Human Rights, an immigrant rights organization. He said the president's rhetoric is placing a "choke hold" on migrants from the Americas and Mexican Americans on the border.

The otherwise peaceful community of El Paso, others said, is being targeted simply for fighting against anti-immigrant measures with generosity. And just for being Hispanic, for representing a

peek into the future of America's changing demographics.

"The shooter came into our community because we are a Hispanic community and because we have immigrants in our community," said U.S. Rep. Veronica Escobar, D-El Paso, as the sun began to set over the Franklin Mountains "He came here to harm us."

State Rep. Cesar Blanco, whose district includes the Walmart where the shootings happened, had a message for the victims of mass killings, including those in Dayton, Ohio, where another massacre was reported hours after the one in El Paso.

"Be strong Ohio," he said, during a news conference in which he highlighted the work of first responders and locals during blood drives, as well as other acts of kindness like handing out food and bottled water to strangers. "In the face of the worst, El Paso responded with the best."

Still, Saturday's tragedy, locals said, is a result of being in the troubling national spotlight that's drawn harsh rhetoric about bad hombres on the border, plans to build walls -- even a private one -- armed militias, all playing out amid the crush of thousands of Central American families arriving each month to seek asylum only to be turned away.

"That city I see on the news is nothing from what I know and love," said Ana Pejmannia, 60. "We're a generous, giving, tolerant city. We somehow coexist and get along," she said, referring to the proximity of Ciudad Juarez, the sprawling city across the Rio Grande in Mexico, where many El Pasoans have friends and relatives.

Francisco Barrios, 43, on Sunday drove from Chihuahua City in Mexico for his monthly shopping spree, which usually includes a stop at Walmart. He was still in disbelief.

"I thought this kind of tragedy happened only in Mexico," he said. "El Paso is our best example of what we can be," safe and tolerant.

Barrios, who shares the same name as a popular politician in Mexico's north who led a mass political movement in the late 1980s, said it's ironic that the sense of safety in El Paso has been shattered not by migrants from Mexico or Latin America, but by a white man from Dallas.

"On this day, we're all El Pasoans," he said. "Mexicans. Mexican Americans. We're all one."

Asked if he would return to El Paso to shop, he hesitated. "Truth is I don't really know anymore."

Late Sunday, Mexico's Foreign Minister Marcelo Ebrard announced on his Twitter account he will visit El Paso on Monday. Seven of the massacre victims are from Mexico, he said. In total, 13 Mexicans were hit by the bullets.

"This will mark the first time that Mexico condemns an act of this kind as terrorism," Ebrard said in a recorded message on his Twitter feed. He threatened to use legal action to protect Mexican and Mexican American communities in the United States and to extradite the killer to Mexico to face justice.

"Mexico declares its profound rejection and complete condemnation of this barbaric act, in which innocent Mexican men and women lost their lives," he said.

On Saturday night, throngs of Juarez residents dressed in white held a candlelight vigil. Many raised

their cell phones, pointing them toward El Paso in solidarity with residents across the border. One held a sign that read: “No More Guns. Make Love.”

Some of those attending the vigil called on Trump to stop hate and show respect toward immigrants from Latin America.

El Paso County Sheriff Richard Wiles, in a lengthy statement posted on Facebook overnight Saturday, called the shootings “beyond comprehension” and worried that things may only get worse.

“This Anglo man came here to kill Hispanics. ... This entire nation should be outraged. In this day and age we are still confronted with people who will kill another for the sole reason of the color of their skin.

“Not pointing out anyone in particular, but I’m sick of people jumping in front of the cameras offering prayers and condolences as things just keep getting worse. ... It’s time to rise up and hold our representatives accountable at all levels. I want representatives who will stand up against racism.”

Martha Alarcon, 67, has relatives on both sides of the border. Regardless of who, or what, is to blame, she said after church service, “El Paso is a wounded city that needs a lot of healing. Enough with the hatred. Yes, we’re Mexicans, Mexican Americans, but we’re also human beings.”

On Sunday night, hundreds turned out for a celebration of the birthday of Joaquin Oliver, one of the victims of the Parkland High School shooting. The event had been pre-planned to raise awareness about immigration rights and to unveil a mural depicting the teen on what would have been his 19th birthday outside of the Las Americas Immigrant Advocacy Center.

“You don’t target Latinos like that,” warned Manuel Oliver, Joaquin’s father. “We are muchos ...”

*Staff writer Cassandra Jaramillo contributed to this report.*